

[SHORT NOTE]

ANOTHER MAORI BARKCLOTH BEATER FROM THE KAIPARA HARBOUR

ROGER NEICH

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New Zealand Maori manufacture of barkcloth, aute, from the inner bark of the paper mulberry tree (*Broussonetia papyrifera*) is one of those Pacific-wide technologies that clearly demonstrate the Eastern Polynesian origins of the Maori. Aute barkcloth was still being made in New Zealand when Cook's expedition arrived here in 1769, following a process and technology that apparently had not changed over the previous several hundred years since its introduction by the first Polynesian settlers. However, soon after European settlement, the manufacture and use of aute barkcloth became obsolete. By the 1840s, the paper mulberry had become extinct through neglect of the plantations and the depredations of introduced cattle. All that have survived are some barkcloth beaters, some very doubtful examples of Maori barkcloth, some sketches by Cook's artists of Maori wearing small rolls of aute in their ears, and a corpus of Maori traditions and place names relating to the manufacture and use of aute.

A recent survey (Neich 1996) of all this evidence documented all the then known surviving Maori barkcloth beaters, fourteen in total, that have been found in swamps, lake beds, stream beds, estuarine gravels, and estuarine tidal mud flats. Only one of these was associated with a known archaeological site, from the bed of Lake Mangakaware in the vicinity of a prehistoric swamp fortification on the lakeshore. They are distributed across the northern parts of the North Island, with concentrations in Northland, Auckland and the Waikato. Two of these were found exposed in mud at low tide in the Wainonoro Creek, Whakaki River, leading into the Kaipara Harbour (Neich 1996:130–132). Now, another, fifteenth, Maori barkcloth beater has been found in the Kaipara Harbour area and is described below in the same format as those recorded previously (Neich 1996).

XV. Otamatea River, Kaipara Harbour (Fig. 1)

Locality: This beater was found on the west bank of the Otamatea River, Kaipara Harbour, upstream from Paparoa Point. The find spot is on Map NZMS 260, Sheet Q08, Maungaturoto (Edition 1, 1981) at grid reference 331558.

Repository: As an artefact registered under the Antiquities Act 1975, the repository of this beater is yet to be decided by the Crown.

Registration Number: Interim Auckland Museum Maori antiquity number N.318.

Provenance: Found by Richard Blackwood in October 1999 while walking along the bank of the Otamatea River. Richard spotted the beater by noticing the burnt end of the handle. It was lying with its grooved face downward on a dry bank. He believed it had been flushed out from higher up the river by recent rains which had washed it up on to the dry bank. There is much evidence of Maori occupation along the banks of this river (Mr Richard Blackwood, pers. comm., 2 May 2002).

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Fig.1. Maori barkcloth beater. Otamatea River, Kaipara Harbour.

Weight: 231.9 g.

Size: 33.4 cm long, 4.1 cm wide but longitudinal section split away. Beater portion 20 cm long.

Wood: Kauri branch heartwood. This is highly resinous, dense, reaction wood that resists rotting when the branch falls to the ground and the outer lighter wood decays. This leaves the dense resinous heartwood lying on the forest floor where it is readily available to be shaped into various forms of beaters (Dr Rod Wallace, pers. comm., 2 May 2002).

Description: A longitudinal section running the full length of the artefact has split away, leaving a slightly waterworn surface. One beating facet has longitudinal grooves, the other two surviving facets are smooth, and one facet has been completely split away. The light brown timber with long curving grain imparts a slight wavy curve to the whole artefact. The handle is roughly circular in cross-section, showing adze marks, with a taper to a blunt proximal point which is charred by fire. There is a pronounced shoulder between handle and beater portion on the side with the grooves, also on the surviving plain side but the side opposite the grooves has no shoulder between beater and handle. The beater portion has parallel sides with no evidence of expansion towards the distal end. In cross-section (Fig. 2), the beater portion is quadrangular with distinct edges to the surviving sides. Deep flat-topped longitudinal grooves at a gauge of three to four grooves per centimetre run the full length of the beater portion. The surface of the grooved facet is very smooth with a shiny patina. There is no obvious detritus in the grooves. The distal end is left rough revealing how the beater has been shaped from an off-centre portion of the branch which has subsequently split along one of the radial lines.

Discussion: Following the distinctive features identified for New Zealand barkcloth beaters (Neich 1996:139), this beater can be described as having a quadrangular cross-section, sharp shoulder, no butt enlargement, an overall parallel form, plain longitudinal grooves, only one facet grooved, and no variation in gauge of grooving. Its total length is close to the average of 29.5 cm established previously, while the beater facet constitutes 59.9% of this total length, again close to the previous average proportion. Therefore according to all these features, this beater fits comfortably within the range of most Maori barkcloth beaters. Following the typology established in Neich (1996:140, 142), it can be classified as a Type 1 beater, a type characteristic of Northland.

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Fig. 2. Maori barkcloth beater, distal end. Otamatea River, Kaipara Harbour.

In conclusion, the finding of this barkcloth beater provides no new surprising variations but does add another record to the available information and helps to confirm the validity of the typology previously established.

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REFERENCE

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